DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 467 678 CS 014 620

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TITLE Pupil Decision Making in the Reading Curriculum.
PUB DATE 2002-00-00
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Decision Making; Elementary Secondary Education; *Individual Development; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Programs; *Student Educational Objectives; Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS Locke (John); Reading Uses

ABSTRACT

Being able to make decisions is important for all students. Students need to have opportunities to choose from among alternative situations. Reading, as one curriculum area, provides a plethora of opportunities to choose and to select. The philosopher John Locke believed the following facets of an individual's development were in the ensuing order of importance: being virtuous, such as living a decent life; possessing wisdom to determine choices in life; having good breeding, such as showing good manners and working well with others; and achieving knowledge. This paper contends that reading instruction can definitely make contributions so that students may achieve each of those above named objectives. The paper discusses in turn: sustained silent reading and making decisions; personalized reading and making decisions; the psychology of learning and personalized reading; and the philosophy of reading instruction (such as measurement-driven instruction; reading for problem solving; perennialism; and existentialism). (Contains 11 references.) (NKA)

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Pupil Decision Making in the Reading Curriculum.

by Marlow Ediger

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PUPIL DECISION MAKING IN THE READING CURRICULUM

Being able to make important decisions is important for all pupils. Thus, pupils need to have opportunities to choose, from among alternative situations. Reading, as one curriculum area, provides a plethora of opportunities to choose and to select. Throughout life, individuals make choices in terms of criteria used, hoping for quality results. John Locke (1632- 1704) believed the following facets of a person's development were in the ensuing order of importance:

1. being virtuous, such as living a decent life. There are numerous library books, for example, which may provide inspiration and models for pupil emulation.
2. possessing wisdom as in having foresight to determine appropriate choices to make in life. Pupils here may select and read library books on words of wisdom as in biographies of famous personalities, in proverbs, and in Aesop's Fables.
3. having good breeding such as in exhibiting good manners and working well with others. Library books on bibliotherapy are available to assist pupils in adjusting better to social situations and problems in life.
4. achieving knowledge. There are library materials available to help pupils acquire knowledge in all curriculum areas such as in social studies, science, mathematics, literature, art, music, and physical education (Ediger, 1995, 37-43).

Reading instruction can definitely make its many contributions in order that pupils may achieve each of the above named objectives. Decisions must be made by the learner as to which library books to read sequentially.

Sustained Silent Reading and Making Decisions

Sustained silent reading (SSR) has implications for pupil decision making. From among alternatives, the pupil then needs to choose library books to read during the designated time in the classroom. Here, every one reads, including the classroom teacher. In selected schools, the total school reads a selection, including custodians and cafeteria workers. This, however, may be difficult to implement. The local classroom, with everyone reading silently a self chosen selection, is a more realistic implementation of SSR. The goal here being that pupils see models of adults and children reading a library book. To stress a successful SSR program, the teacher may

1. develop a bulletin board display of possibilities for library books to be chosen by pupils for reading.
2. introduce reading selections to children to stimulate interest in SSR.
3. have peers tell about certain library books which they found to be interesting.
4. guide pupils to develop a visible collage pertaining to fascinating library books read.
5. assist peers having read the same library book to develop a mobile to indicate interests and comprehension.
6. cassette record contents from a library book read aloud by a good reader to be used by those who need assistance in reading the same book. The latter may listen to the cassette as he/she reads along silently from that same book.
7. video tape times when everyone in a classroom is actively engaged in SSR. The play back to pupils can be exhilarating.
8. have learners pantomime contents from a library book and have others guess what is being pantomimed.
9. help pupils draw illustrations of content read and post them on the bulletin board for all to see in the classroom.
10. arrange committees to engage pupils in telling about favorite incidences read in a library book (See also -- Hatcher and Olson, September/October, 1984).

SSR provides ample opportunities for pupils to make decisions on selecting and reading library materials.

Personalized Reading and Decision Making

With personalized reading, the pupil chooses a library book to read. The book chosen, as is true of SSR, should be on the reading level of the learner, not the frustrational level. The chosen book should be of maximum interest to the reader. The learner is in control of what is selected and read. The teacher assists when the pupil is not able to make a selection. Personalized reading may replace or be added on to the regular reading curriculum involving basal reader use.

After completing the reading of a library book, the pupil may have a conference with the teacher to assess comprehension and reading skills. The pupil may use diverse ways to reveal comprehension of content (See Gardner, 1999). The teacher may record, date, and compare earlier with later conferences held with the pupil to notice the latter's progress.

Personalized reading stresses the importance of

1. the learner making choices in terms of content to be read. External dictates are not in evidence such as state mandated objectives to be achieved. However, personalized reading should help pupils to do better on these kinds of externally devised tests.

2. the learner has input into the assessment process following the completion of reading a library book. He/she may then suggest ideas for discussion in the conference with the classroom teacher. The pupil may also choose which selection to read orally so that the teacher might appraise reading progress.

3. the pupil is heavily involved in sequencing his/her own reading experiences.

4. decision making is a leading goal of personalized reading with the learner choosing sequential books to read.

5. accountability in reading should be emphasized. With accountability in reading, the pupil may

a) do journal writing covering content read or personal impressions gained in personalized reading.

b) draw sequential illustrations of what was read.

c) pantomime certain selections from the book read.

d) make a model pertaining to selected concepts contained in a completed library book.

e) complete a related bulletin board display on "My favorite library book."

f) write a poem or an essay on my favorite character in a narrative library book read.

g) keep a diary on daily reading activities in personalized reading.

h) summarize the diary entries with writing a log.

i) video- tape working with others in a collaborative activity involving personalized reading (Ediger and Rao, 2001, Chapter Eight).

The Psychology of Learning and Personalized Reading

Humanism, as a psychology of learning, is strongly in evidence in personalized reading. The focal point here is upon the pupil as being central in the reading curriculum. The pupil is a chooser. Thus, the learner selects, from among a variety of library books, the following kinds of reading materials:

1. those which are interesting.

2. those which possess intrinsic purpose or reasons for reading.

3. those which are related to personal background

experiences possessed.

4. those which emphasize meaningful learning.
5. those which are perceived as being personally worthwhile.
6. those which are on the recreational or instructional level, not the frustrational, level of reading.
7. those which stress either an individual or collaborative learning style. With collaboration, the pupil is the chooser of being a committee member in which all have read the same paperback (See Searson and Dunn, 2001).
8. those which emphasize personal choices in how to be evaluated (See Gardner, 1993).
9. those which have enduring values.
10. those which meet needs of pupils individually (Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Six).

The psychology of learning is important to stress in that it does assist pupils to achieve more optimally in the classroom setting.

Philosophy of Reading Instruction

Measurement driven instruction (MDI) has become quite common with the many tests administered in the public schools for determining pupil achievement as well as teacher accountability. The concept of measurability of achievement has its roots in the manufacturing and business world. Here, profits and losses can be ascertained in terms of dollars and cents. Precision and accuracy are key terms to emphasize. If achievement is there, it can be measured precisely. Noll (1987) wrote the following:

Mental measurement and scientifically grounded assessment instruments date back to the beginnings of the 20th century as part of a general movement to devise a "science of education."

...Somewhat similarly, the current dispute over measurement concerns whether the art of teaching and the art of learning can be clearly assessed by the science of testing. W. James Popham, an advocate of standardized testing, contends that high quality testing programs are essential to the survival of public schooling. The tax paying public has exerted great pressure for more concrete evidence of performance in light of what is seen as a decline in standards over recent decades.

Opponents raise the question about the quality of fairness of the current tests and about the effects of test- retest

competition on both students and schools. Banesh Hoffman's 1962 book, The Tyranny of Testing, first posed these concerns. More recently, Andrew J. Strenio, Jr., in his book The Testing Trap, attacks meritocratic competitiveness, the perpetuation of the fear of failure, curricular manipulation by the test makers, the distortion of the teaching process, and the "branding" of children which emanate from an overemphasis upon standardized test results. Harold Berlak of the Public Information Network offers a case against the current heavy dependence upon standard examinations in an article entitled "Testing in a Democracy (Educational Leadership, October, 1985). He contends that such testing reduces learning to multiple choice test items which trivialize knowledge, that many of the tests are written by experts who are remote from the classroom and from the subject matter, and that teachers are spending more and more time teaching tests.

Testing and measuring has its role, along with other evaluation procedures, to ascertain pupil achievement. One, however, should not go overboard on a single procedure to ascertain what pupils have learned and achieved. Quality tests need to be written which are valid in that they cover what has been meaningfully taught. These tests should be reliable in that they measure consistently what pupils have acquired and imbibed.

Problem solving, as a second approach to evaluation of pupil progress, stresses different tenets as compared to MDI. Problem solving stresses practical situations in life. Thus in context, pupils identify a problem area. The problem needs to be clear and distinct so it can be solved. Information is gathered in answer to the problem. Reading can be a major approach in the information gathering process. A tentative hypothesis should result. The hypothesis is an temporary answer to the problem. A reality based situation needs to accrue to evaluate the worth of the hypothesis. The hypothesis is then accepted or revised.

It would be impossible to give a numerical absolute score for the quality of each flexible step in problem solving. There are also diverse procedures to use in problem solving; the above is one model. Problem solving is open ended as an approach in teaching and learning situations. Pupils cooperatively select the problem. The teacher is a guide and stimulates pupil learning. From the total learning environment, pupils select a problem which possesses intrinsic motivation for solving. The interests of pupils are generally involved in problem selection. Interest

provides for effort in learning and seeking possible solutions to problems. Pertaining to John Dewey and his problem solving emphasis in the curriculum, Good and Teller (1973) wrote the following:

Dewey held that we think when we must, and that thinking originates in a perplexity, an obstacle, or a doubt. Some have regarded this as a great discovery but it is in fact only a truism. If thinking is defined as the effort to find the answer to a problem or to resolve a perplexity, then, naturally it cannot occur except in the presence of some difficulty. Like other truisms however, this one is worth stating. It says that situations can be set up to stimulate thinking.

The sources and varied nature of pupil's problems are themselves problems that closely concern the teacher. Children are active by nature, "spilling with activities," and from these practical concerns many problems arise. Getting out of this play pen is for the small child a problem that is about par with the problem of the cat in the cage. Rousseau nd Froebel suggested many children's activities that involve problems, but they did not, like Dewey, consider the detailed ways in which the problems are solved by children. Dewey suggests a few somewhat more intellectual but still simple problems. From How We Think everyone will remember the case of the ferry boat with the white pole projecting from the front of the pilothouse, the soapy tumblers, and the problem in transportation.

Such examples are altogether appropriate as types of work for children; but they lead to the notion that problems usually or always arise from external conditions. This is not true. Philosophers including Dewey have often gone out in search of p[problems because they enjoyed thinking. Problems do not always arise from circumstances nor do they have to be assigned by a teacher. It is a fact of history that science has been created largely by pure scientists -- Galilleo, Newton, Faraday, Darwin, and a host of others who went out to look for problems and investigated them for the love of it.

A third approach in reading, namely perennialism, has a definite philosophy to emphasize. Perennialists advocate pupils read library books stressing the great ideas of he past. There are books which have survived time and space. They contain the treasured ideas of the past. These Great Books are well known by title and author such as

1. The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne.
2. Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson.

4. A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens.
5. Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare.

Additional great writers, among others, who are from the past but well known presently are Edgar Allen Poe, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Leo Tolstoy, Sir Walter Scott, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. These writers have written the classics. Perennialists believe that good literature needs to be considered important over an extended period of years to notice if it remains salient, not temporary. There are a dearth of writings which may have been important within a short segment of time, but they are not well known today. Within a long period of time, writers can be identified who are considered to have written the classics and whose fame has remained important, significant, and unfaltering. Pertaining to Perennialism as a philosophy of literacy in good literature, Hutchins (1953) wrote the following in his essay "The Conflict in Education":

Nor is it possible for a person to have too much liberal education, because it is impossible to have too much understanding and judgment. But it is possible to undertake too much in the name of liberal education in youth. The object of liberal education in youth is not to teach the young all they ever need to know. It is to give them the habits, ideas, and techniques that they need to continue to educate themselves.
Thus, the object of formal education in youth is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives. I would remind you of the impossibility of learning to understand and judge many of the most important things in life. The judgment and understanding of practical affairs can amount to little in he absence of experiences with practical affairs. Subjects that cannot be understood without experience should not be taught to those who are without experience; it should be clear that those subjects can be taught only by way of introduction and that their value to the student depends upon his continuing to study them as he acquires experience. The tragedy in America is that economics, ethics, politics, history and literature are studied in youth, and seldom studied again. Therefore the graduates of American universities seldom understand them.

Simplified versions of the Great Books can be purchased and read by pupils. This might well assist them to better understand the original writings when reading the classics at a later time. Recently, advocates of The Great Books have advocated that the teacher choose books for pupils to read if they are the classics or not. The book chosen needs to

1. be highly interesting to children.
2. contain content pertaining to morality, ideally.
3. promote reading habits on the part of pupils.
4. encourage lively interaction among pupils when the teacher leads the discussion pertaining to contents in each library book.
5. promote wide reading of content by pupils, as well as promote lifelong reading habits.

A fourth reading philosophy is existentialism. Existentialists advocate a literature curriculum which focusses on

1. the human condition with its many uncertainties.
2. the dread and anxiety which individuals have when making decisions and choices.
3. freedom which individuals face when choosing from the many alternatives in life.
4. the realization that death is the ultimate for all persons.
5. feelings of loneliness in being by the self when facing life's dilemmas. Harper (1955) wrote the following:

Existentialism is, as the word implies, a philosophy of human existence. It arose early in the nineteenth century in response to a cultural climate in which Soren Kierkegaard observed that men had forgotten what it means to exist. Men had learned what it means to be in a crowd, to be a mass- man; but they had forgotten what it means to be an individual, that is what it means to die, to suffer, to love. They had forgotten what it means to stand apart, as each man is born to stand apart, from the rest of the universe and from one's fellows...

Library books emphasizing existentialism stress the following kinds of books for each pupil to select from:

1. those which contain problems faced in life by individuals.
2. those which stress handicaps faced by individuals.
3. those which reflect dread and awe faced by individuals in decision making.
4. those emphasizing loneliness and isolation from other human beings.
5. those stressing the human condition with its joys and sorrows.

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